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Lifeguard Fitness Readiness: Certification vs. Qualification

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Purpose of the Literature Review

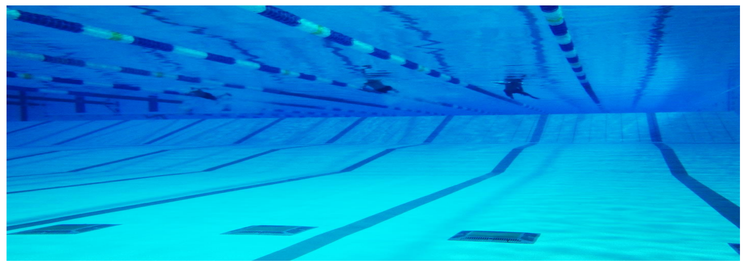
The purpose of this study is to Review in-service logs (written outline) for cardio and strength components within lifeguard in-services, in order to design appropriate in-service fitness readiness guidelines in order to improve the overall training of lifeguards.

Need for the Study

Aquatic safety is a major concern of leisure service providers on a worldwide basis. Incidents of drowning are one of the leading causes of accidental deaths in countries throughout the world. According to the World Heath Organization (2014) drowning is rated third leading cause of death worldwide.

To become a lifeguard, one must first complete the pre-test skills, attend all class sessions, pass written test and pass final scenarios. There are a variety of certifying bodies in the United States of America and each entity has their own pre-test requirements. The primary certifying bodies include: the *American Red Cross*, *Ellis & Associates*, *YMCA*, *Starfish Aquatics Institute*, and *National Aquatic Safety Company*. In addition, each organization vary in class structure and skill emphasis.

A training issue that is neglected and overlooked is the requirements of lifeguards maintaining or improving their physical fitness ability throughout their certification. To ensure patron safety, it is crucial that lifeguards maintaining their fitness readiness. Need for universal compliance for minimum levels of fitness that lifeguards maintain.



Literature Review

Wendling, Vogelsong, Wuensch, and Ammirati (2007) looked at the perceptions of lifeguards. They had a small sample size of 34 lifeguards from nine pools in eastern North Carolina. They sent questionnaires and had a 67.6% response rate. At each pool they had monthly skills testing, testing lifeguards on CPR skills, airway obstruction, and spinal injuries. These are important skills that lifeguards should be proficient on and confident with. Griffiths et al. (1997) warned that an “alarming percentage of certified lifeguards are not highly confident in their ability to make a rescue” (p. 327). In 1998, 63% of lifeguard rated their on the job or in-service training as more valuable than what they received from their certifying agency. (Vogelsong, Griffiths, and Steel, 2000,p. 68). *This is an important fact that lifeguards need quality in-services.*

In making the case for in-service training, there are obvious and clear benefits. It’s easy for aquatic supervisors and manger to assume that if a guard is certified, his or her rescue abilities are high (Turner, Vogelsong, and Wendling, 2003, p. 43). This is a dangerous assumption, however, because many lifeguards need more practice beyond what the certification process and normal guarding duties demand. This is a very powerful point that there needs to be more conditioning than the American Red Cross Lifeguarding pre-test, which only requires that participants swim 300 yards or the 100 yard requirement by Ellis and Associates.

In-service training is supplemental training that should be separate from the certification process. Earning a lifeguarding certification means you have successfully completed a training course and passed written and skill evaluation on a given date. It does not mean that you have learned everything there is to know about lifeguarding. Once hired as a lifeguard, you should expect that you will be required to continue your training. (American Red Cross Lifeguard Manual, 2012; Turner, Vogelsong, & Wendling, 2003).

Having standards of fitness is crucial to ensure that Lifeguards are improving their level of fitness. Requiring cardio and strength training incorporated during in-services along with weekly requirements will help to make sure that when an emergency situation does occur that the Lifeguards will not only know what to do, but be able to perform quickly and efficiently.

Pre-Test Requirements for Lifeguarding

Lifeguard Certifying Body	Swim*	Tread Time*	Object Retrieval*	Other
Red Cross	300 yards	2 minutes (no hands)	20 yard swim, Retrieve 10 lbs brick at 7-10 ft water depth (1 minute & 40 seconds to complete)	
Ellis and Associates	100 yards	1 min (no hands)	Feet first surface dive to retrieve 10 lbs brick at minimum water depth of 8ft	
YMCA	100 yards front crawl Plus 50 yards of each stroke below: Front crawl head up, sidestroke, breaststroke, breaststroke head up, elementary backstroke with hands on stomach)	2 minutes	Swimming sprint 60 ft, surface dive 8-10 ft to retrieve dive ring, then tread 1 min (legs only). Followed by swimming the rest of pool, hoist self out (without ladder), then begin compressions (100 per min)	Feet-first surface dive in 8-10 ft water or deepest part of pool), then swim 15 ft underwater
StarGuard	100 yards (head up)	NA	NA	
National Aquatic Safety Company (NASCO)	200 yards	NA	Swim 15 feet then retrieve, 10lbs brick from deepest part of the pool and return brick to pool side.	

*pre-test skill activities

Pre-Test Requirements for Lifeguarding (Continued)

American Red Cross pre-test includes a 300 yard swim, either front crawl or breaststroke is acceptable, which goggles are allowed. Then two minute tread, no hands are allowed, participant can hold hands above water or they can put their hands under their armpits. The last part of the test is a brick retrieval, participant starts in the water, swim 20 yards, swim down 7-10ft. to retrieve a 10lbs brick, and then participant returns the brick to starting point, while maintaining two hands on the brick and face at the surface of the water.

Ellis and Associates pre-test includes 100 yard swim, either front crawl or breaststroke. The brick retrieval the participant must do a feet-first surface dive to a depth of at least 8ft. and bring 10lbs brick to surface. And the final is a one minute tread without hands. In their book it is oblivious that aggressive scanning techniques are key fundamentals that are taught to their lifeguards.

YMCA pre-test includes three phases to complete. The first phase is treading water for two minutes and then swim 100 yards front crawl. The second phase includes swimming a 50 of each of the following: front crawl with head up, sidestroke, breaststroke head up, and elementary backstroke kick with hands on stomach. Along with this phase the participant preforms a feet-first surface dive to a depth of 8-10 ft. then swim 15 yards underwater. The third phase starts at the end of the pool, sprit swim 60 yards, surface dive 8-10ft., pick up a dive ring from bottom, bring to surface, tread 1 minute without hands, place object back at the bottom of the pool, then swim rest of length of the pool, hoist self out, and immediately begin compressions on an adult manikin for 1 minute.

StarGuard has a lot of the same requirements, in their book it talks about layers of protection and at the heart of it is surveillance, this topic is highlighted a lot throughout the book.

NASCO the pre-test is very basic and they reference American Red Cross a lot in their manual. Some of the things that differentiate in the book is certain rescue techniques that have been adapted from the American Red Cross system.